



Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, October 20, 2008
www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae
Docket #: 07-cr-058-AWI

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CARUTHERS RESIDENT SENTENCED TO 14 YEARS FOR METH CONSPIRACY

FRESNO, Calif.—United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that United States District Judge Anthony W. Ishii sentenced RIGOBERTO LOPEZ-AGUILAR, aka Salvador Martinez, aka Adrian Palomino, 36, of Caruthers, Calif. to 14 years in prison for conspiring to distribute 5.5 pounds of high-purity crystal methamphetamine. LOPEZ-AGUILAR pleaded guilty on August 4, 2008.

This case is the product of a joint investigation by the DEA and Fresno Police Department with assistance from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Karen A. Escobar, who prosecuted the case, LOPEZ-AGUILAR is an illegal alien who has a prior felony drug conviction in the San Francisco Bay Area.. He and his co-defendants were arrested on February 13, 2007 for attempting to sell the methamphetamine to a confidential source after LOPEZ-AGUILAR had negotiated with the confidential source for the delivery and sale of the drug. He had obtained the methamphetamine from co-defendant MIGUEL ANGEL NUNEZ-BARRAGAN, 33, a previously deported illegal alien residing in San Diego, who, in turn, obtained the drug from co-defendant JOSE ESQUIVEL MENDEZ, aka Alberto Perez-Lopez, 24, an illegal alien from Michoacan, Mexico.

According to evidence presented at the time of LOPEZ-AGUILAR's sentencing, the methamphetamine was smuggled into the United States after protracted negotiations during which LOPEZ-AGUILAR acknowledged increased security at the United States/Mexico border. Mexico is the primary source of methamphetamine in U.S. markets.

NUNEZ-BARRAGAN has entered a guilty plea to the drug conspiracy and is scheduled for sentencing on November 17, 2008. ESQUIVEL MENDEZ, whose charges are still pending, is next scheduled to appear in court for a status conference on October 27, 2008.

LOPEZ-AGUILAR is subject to deportation after he serves his 14-year prison sentence.

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